

BIRD NOTES OF SEVENTY YEARS AGO

By L. GLAUERT, W.A. Museum, Perth.

A report upon certain "Native Game Birds" submitted to the Governor by W. Pearce Clifton, the Resident Magistrate at Bunbury on September 18, 1878, has recently been found in the letter-book of the resident magistrate at Bunbury in the State Archives. It was prepared in response to a circular issued by the Colonial Secretary (R. T. Goldsworthy) on August 14, 1878, soliciting information on a specified list of game birds with a view to fixing close seasons. As useful references are made to the birdlife of that period I have thought it of interest to extract the following statements, and have added the scientific names.

BLACK SWAN (*Chenopsis atrata*):

It seems from all I can learn that at certain seasons of the year these birds congregate in larger numbers on the Leschenault Estuary than on any of the other estuaries and lakes skirting the coast. From January to July they abound in enormous numbers—the shallow banks covered with weed which skirt its shores on both sides, and more especially towards its northern extremity, being their favourite feeding grounds. In the evening and early part of the night the birds which during the day have been feeding on the Estuary pass down in continuous small flights for the purpose of obtaining *fresh* water in the swamps and pools inland, returning again later in the night and early morning.

Night after night during the open season the sportsmen lie in wait on the shore of the narrow part of the Estuary opposite the mouth of the Preston to intercept the birds in their flight inland and hundreds—thousands I may say—during the season are slaughtered. Over twenty sometimes fall to one man's gun, but few of the birds shot are made use of for food—and little of the down, which would be of value, is saved.

The swan never builds nor breeds upon the shores of the Estuary nor as far as I can learn on any of the salt water estuaries, excepting at Augusta. There on the islands in the Blackwood they are said to breed in large numbers. A few build their nests on the Harvey Plains and in similar plains, morasses and lagoons extending southward from the Harvey Estuary to the Collic. But nowhere on the western side of the Darling Range do they breed in *large* numbers, except at the Capel swamps. There in the breeding season they are very numerous and their nests are frequently met with in the rushes on the margins of the freshwater pools and swamps. A person told me he knew of eight nests there at the present time with the birds sitting.

In the country to the eastward of Messrs. Muir's on the road from Bridgetown to Albany, and elsewhere to the eastward of the Warren and Blackwood there are lakes and swamps on which I am told the swans breed in large numbers, but it seems the general opinion of all most conversant with the subject that the

enormous numbers of swans which during the summer time congregate on the estuaries near the coast, cannot be reared on the breeding places alluded to—that comparatively few build in those localities, and that their chief breeding places must be further away in the interior. This opinion receives some confirmation from what was noticed by all those persons who were frequently swan-shooting on the Leschenault Estuary last summer, when the birds were more than usually numerous—that most of them seemed to be bewildered as if in a strange place and seared and stupid as if they had never seen man or heard the report of a gun before.

The young birds are hatched about the month of September, and there is a general concurrence in opinion that no alteration should be made in the present close season, viz., from July 1 to November 30.

WILD GOOSE (= Cape Barren Goose, *Cereopsis novae-hollandiae*). Unknown here—no such bird in this part of the country.

GREY DUCK (*Anas superciliosa*):

Except on the salt water lakes and estuaries breeds everywhere between the hills and the coast—on the margins of swamps, pools and in the open plains. Hatch mostly in September. Their feeding grounds are almost exclusively confined to the estuaries. July to November the correct close time.

MOUNTAIN DUCK (*Casarca tadornoides*):

Frequent Lakes Clifton and Preston and the salt lagoons there, but are not numerous in the Leschenault Estuary and no one here seems to know where they breed, but I learn from the Capel that their nests are frequently to be seen in tooart trees at the edge of the swamps at the Capel and the Vasse.

WHITE-WING DUCK (= White-eyed Duck, *Nyroca australis*): Rare, nothing known of its habits.

TEAL (*Querquedula gibberifrons*):

Nothing known of the habits of this migratory bird. No one in these parts, not even the natives, know where they breed or where they come from. They generally frequent the Estuary in enormous numbers during the summer and early part of winter, but last summer very few made their appearance. The White-wing Duck comes and disappears with the Teal.

EMU (*Dromaius novae-hollandiae*):

So much discrepancy in the statements made respecting their breeding time that I suspect it must vary very much according to season and locality. At the Upper Preston eggs have been taken in July and August, while it is stated by some that the young birds do not appear till November.

GNOW (*Leipoa ocellata*):

We know nothing of this bird, though a stray one has occasionally been seen high up on the Harvey and the Preston. I learn

from reliable authority, my informant knowing the bird well, that in a great thicket near Cape Naturaliste there are several gnaw's nests and that they breed there.

BUSTARD (*Eupodotis australis*):

Is now scarce in this district. Every particular as to its habits may be obtained from parties living at Mandurah, Rockingham or the Serpentine, for in that part of the country the bustard or wild turkey used to, and I believe still does, abound.

THE ORNITHOLOGICAL COLLECTING OF DR. L. PREISS IN 1839

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Dr. Johann August Ludwig Preiss was a German naturalist who collected in the Swan River Colony in the early years of its establishment. He commenced his activities in the Fremantle area in December, 1838, and left the colony direct for London on January 8, 1842. Thus his work was contemporary with that of John Gilbert, the able collector for the celebrated Gould.

Preiss was an assiduous collector whose collections of botanical and zoological specimens numbered several hundred thousands and yet today little is known concerning the whereabouts or composition of most of this material. When therefore, the State Archivist, Miss M. Lukis, drew my attention to a letter she had found among the State papers, a letter to which was appended a list of the birds collected by him up to October 11, 1838, I realised its importance and thanked Miss Lukis for bringing it under my notice.

The letter is an offer of the entire collection to the government for £3,000, £2,000 to be "in ready money" and the balance in the form of a grant of land at the minimum price of 5/- per acre. Apparently nothing resulted from the offer, though no other documents bearing on it are available. Had the transaction gone through the collection would have been forwarded to the British Museum and would not have been retained in the colony.

After listing the species in the collection Preiss added: "These birds are well skinned and stuffed. On each etiquette is the number, the name with synonyms, the colour of the iris and lens crystallina, locus natalis, date, year, colonial and native name, genus, whether male or female, old or young and of different ages, the colour of some parts of the birds as the bill, crista, carunculae, feet, etc.—their food, the voice partly imitated by music notes, rare or not, nest and eggs, but not of every bird—and preserved the tongue. I have now about 600 specimens containing 162 species."

The information provided about each specimen is extraordinarily detailed even by present-day standards, and I venture to sug-